

An Outline on the Understanding of Dynamic Meditation

by K. Khemananda

I would like to draw your attention to the different aspects of dynamic meditation from static meditation in terms of practice and goal. Static meditation oppresses the plurality of life and forces it to a state of calmness. The subjective mind blocks itself and brings about calmness in that manner. The mind subjected to its own limitations sees only certain selected objects (and clings to a kind of arising sensation according to such objects). As in all static states, whenever the subtle sensations arise, consciousness finds its ground of rebirth in the conceptual thought of the one who observes unless awareness is illuminated. Static meditation may guide the mind to "be born" into various states of being according to the different objects of the mind until it reaches the supreme state of "Brahma Loka", the block end of calmness. It is the most static state of mind.

This type of meditation is better called concentration. It induces calmness faster and seemingly more charming in the beginning. It somehow satisfies those who need calmness to escape from frenzy and restlessness. However, as this calmness is merely the result of centralized action, in the long run the practitioner is fettered by egoistic feeling (mananusaya) or self-importance. This kind of concentration, in fact, is not the direct teaching of the Buddha. It was practiced before his time. Two great gurus, Uddaka and Arala, followed this line. We learn from the biography of the Buddha that the young ascetic Gotama was not satisfied with the final goal taught by these two hermits, who in those days were adored as knowers or arhats. Dynamic meditation (also known as "Satipatthana" or "Sati Meditation") is distinguished by the movements of both body and mind which open the mind to know fully things just as they are, without selecting and limiting its possibility. The practitioner maintains awareness of the spontaneous action of body and mind. The single importance of this kind of meditation is the arousing of the knowingness nature that originally lies in the mind. It is not a practice to gain or cling to any object or state of being. It is emphasized that one should not focus the mind on any static object. One simply and naturally guides the mind to know just the movement, without judging, projecting or expecting anything. In other words, one brings the mind to an inactive state of "the unknowing knowing". This is the end of volitional action and the beginning of seeing spontaneity in order to free the mind from merely conceptualizing dharma.

Most important of all, one must bear in mind that the purpose of dynamic meditation is not to induce and cling to calmness. Otherwise, one would unconsciously guide the dynamic form to the static one. The aim of dynamic meditation is just to "know", to bare-witness things as they are. Hence, one must keep the mind alert rather than calm. In order to achieve alertness of mind, one can practice bodily movement in a slow, smooth and regular rhythm. By such movement of its own fulfillment, one can have knowingness of each movement and can finally break through the chain of thoughts. That is to say, the

knowingness nature, which has been clouded by thoughts, arises by the bodily rhythmic movements. There is then an awareness of thoughts as they arise, even though they may be very fast and deep. Inner balance and normality then manifest as a state of equilibrium which enables one to recognize things spontaneously, and hence be free from action. Dynamic meditation leads to pure insight of non-duality. Then the inner polarity between subjectivity and objectivity ceases.

A practitioner at this level is able to see the difference between calmness superimposed by delusion and controlled action on the one hand, and equilibrium of the mind, which is its intrinsic value, on the other. The latter is pure knowingness. Although static meditation, practiced in a static posture, aims to induce calmness, it can also gain insight and understanding of some of the objects in the mind ("nama-rupa", or name and form). It cannot, however, gain unconditional insight categorically in a sudden touch of those inner objects. It is most important to remember that static meditation cannot see the attachment of existence (Bhavanusaya) because the result (Vipaka) of such action is a condition of attachment itself.

It is obvious that the static form of practice, theoretically and conventionally, emphasizes the calming of the mind until it reaches or bypasses the state of jhana (upacara and appana) after subduing obstacles (the five nivarana), and then considers the three aspects of things (aniccam, dukkham and anatta). On account of such action, the reactive effect is, in fact, to always turn pure seeing into discriminative conceptualizing. Under the circumstances, the practitioner mostly clings, grasps and attaches to calmness, and cannot progress further. Or, if he/she manages to progress further into the aspects of discriminative conceptualization, he/she will be in doubt and polarized between subjectivity and objectivity.

The way of mindfulness, which is the diamond seat (Vajarasana) of the enlightened Buddha, was mentioned first under the shadow of the ficus tree (Bodhagaya) in India two thousand years ago. The tree was later named the "Bodhi Tree" which symbolized the awakening of Gotama, the Buddha. After six years of searching under the old belief of static form of trances, he realized his mistake from the movement of the golden plate against the stream, and found his new horizon in practice. It was not the old cult of perfect control of oneself with the aim to induce calmness.

The Dharmapatha recounts various examples of dynamic meditation practice in which the Buddha's disciples attained final enlightenment. The Buddha suggested to one of his disciples, Cullapanthaka, that he practice mindfulness while moving his hand on a rag cloth. To another, a young girl from the town of Arawi, he advised her to practice mindfulness of hand movement while working as a weaver. With the development of mindfulness on the moving objects, the dynamic way of meditation naturally guided these devotees to their goal.

The success of dynamic meditation was outstanding in the history of Chinese dhyana or Ch'an Buddhism during the time of the sixth Patriarch, Hui-Neng. It was further developed by Ma-tsu Tao-i. The teaching of Hui-Neng in the Tang Dynasty, both in

principle and in practice, is definitely the same as the teaching of Luangpor Teean, the forefather of dynamic meditation in Thailand in recent days.

When the Chinese dynamic dhyana spread to Japan, the external form gradually became more static until the present day. In my view, Tibetan Buddhism is very dynamic, just as the method of Thailand's Luangpor Teean is.

In fact, the difference between dynamic and static meditation is defined merely by their respective outer forms of practice. The most significant factor in both methods is the pure awareness and insight which makes one's mind fully awake and free from all attachment. Both dynamic and static meditation are just as skillful means (Upaya) to help one to reach the final goal.

In my personal opinion, the dynamic method gives me joyful practice. The hardship burdened by the goal of static calmness is absent in dynamic meditation which is, to me, more simple and charming.

Guidelines for Dynamic Meditation Practice

Observe within oneself without specific interest in any object.

Move the hands or legs in a rhythmic manner at regular intervals in two postures (sitting and walking) or four postures (standing, walking, sitting and lying down).

Move the hands or legs in rhythmic motions slowly at the beginning of each practice session.

Move normally without any specific aim or expectation.

While the hands or legs are moving, be aware of ("know", "feel", "sense") each stroke of the movement as it occurs.

The practice should be a continuous, unbroken chain of movement with accompanying awareness.

When the awareness is absent or disconnected from the movement, start anew. Do not try to find out how or why it blundered.

Do not be interested in calming the mind, but only in "knowing".

Let go of everything that one knows.

The Author: K. Khemananda

K. Khemananda (Kovit Aneckachai) was born in a small village on the shore of Lake Songkhla in southern Thailand in 1938. A student of art, he graduated with a Bachelor's degree from Silpakorn University, Bangkok. Two years later, in 1967, he was ordained as a monk and went to reside at Suan Mokh where he practiced under the guidance of the Venerable Buddhadasa.

In 1973 he met his second teacher, Luangpor Teean, who was unable to read or write but was characterized by Khemananda as Zen-like.

Khemananda's training has given him a strong interest in Mahayana and Zen Buddhism as well as in the truths found within other religions. As a result he came to find the life of a Theravada monk, circumscribed by strict interpretation of the Vinaya as well as the Thai tradition, excessively stifling. The feeling of being constrained, of being dissatisfied, and political pressure led him to leave Thailand when he was invited to lecture groups in Singapore on dharma practice in 1979. He subsequently lived at a dharma centre in Australia. In 1983 he decided to disrobe and returned to Thailand as a layman. He has continued to paint, to teach and to publish books of poetry and essays on dharma.

Khemananda's recent book, Know Not a Thing - Insights into Dynamic Meditation (published by White Lotus Press in 1997 and available through Amazon.com) is a compilation of talks he gave while conducting several meditation retreats in the United States in 1991. The book provides insights and guidance into the practice of Mahasati mediation, and also traces his search for true awareness.

[Home Page]

Last updated: 9/19/1999

Source: http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/3369/outline_of_mm.html